

What is cholera?

Cholera is an intestinal disease caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*, serogroup O1 or O139. Although most cases of cholera are seen in areas such as Asia, Africa and South America, a few cases occur in the United States each year.

Who gets cholera?

Those at risk for getting cholera are people traveling to foreign countries where outbreaks are occurring and people who eat raw or undercooked seafood from warm coastal waters that might be contaminated with sewage. In both instances, the risk is quite small.

How is the bacteria spread?

The cholera organisms are found in the stool or vomitus of an infected person. The stool or vomitus can directly contaminate food or water, or a person who is infected can spread the bacteria by not washing their hands after going to the bathroom and then handling food that is eaten by others. In the United States, most cases have been related to eating raw or undercooked seafood.

What are the symptoms of cholera?

The majority of persons exposed to the cholera organism will not develop any symptoms. The most common symptom is mild to severe watery diarrhea, and sometimes vomiting. In severe untreated cases, death can occur within a few hours due to loss of a lot of fluid. With proper treatment, very few people will die from cholera.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can occur within 6 hours to 5 days after exposure, usually within 2-3 days.

Where are the bacteria that causes cholera found?

Vibrio cholerae is found in people (with or without symptoms). Recent evidence suggests that the bacteria may also be able to survive in certain types of water near the ocean (i.e., brackish water or estuaries).

What is the treatment for cholera?

The most important treatment is fluid replacement. Often, drinking large volumes of water is adequate. However, intravenous (I.V.) fluids may be necessary. Antibiotics, such

as tetracycline, are also used to shorten the duration of diarrhea and shedding of the bacteria in the stool.

Is there a vaccine for cholera?

A vaccine is available but provides only partial protection of short duration and does not prevent asymptomatic infection. The use of this vaccine is not recommended by the World Health Organization and is normally required for travel only when proof of vaccine is required for entry to a country.

How can cholera be prevented?

When traveling in countries where cholera is present, only thoroughly cooked hot foods, fruits that you peel, and bottled beverages or chlorinated water should be consumed. Thorough hand washing with soap after using the bathroom and before preparing or eating food is important in preventing the spread of the bacteria.

